

24 April 1984

USSR/  
AFGHANISTAN

RATHER: Good evening. This is the CBS Evening News, Dan Rather reporting. The Soviet Union has opened a massive new offensive in Afghanistan. It includes wave after wave of high-altitude carpet-bombing by strategic aircraft and large-scale ground combat. The main immediate target apparently has been the important Panjshir Valley. Radio Kabul, controlled by Soviet occupiers, claimed today that rebel positions in the valley have been overrun and captured. If true, this would open vital supply routes for Soviet forces as they try to break out of what has been their bogged-down Afghan war. Pentagon correspondent David Martin has more.

MARTIN: U.S. officials say thousands of Soviet troops, preceded by hundreds of combat aircraft, have launched the largest offensive of Russia's four-year war in Afghanistan, an offensive marked by the introduction of new and deadly tactics. ALAM ROMBERG (State Dept. Spokesman): The new elements this year are high-altitude saturation bombing by the Soviets and the presence of such large forces.

MARTIN: Now in its third day, the bombing is targeted on the Panjshir Valley. U.S. sources say Badger and Fencer aircraft are flying about 30 high-altitude strikes a day from bases in the Soviet Union, (inaudible)...by the Soviets since World War II. The Panjshir Valley is a major agricultural area and home of about 10,000 Afghan rebels under this man, \*Amad Massau, who U.S. officials says is the best of the Afghan resistance leaders. The high-altitude bombing is followed by close-in air strikes by helicopters and frog-foot aircraft. But U.S. sources say satellite photos of the bomb craters show a random pattern which makes the air raids look more like an indiscriminate terror tactic than precision strikes against guerrilla bases. MICHAEL BURCH (Pentagon Spokesman): It appears that the force levels of both personnel and aircraft and, ah, armor, these levels may be higher than ever before.

MARTIN: A column of 20,000 Soviet and Afghan troops, including hundreds of tanks and other armored vehicles is moving into the valley. Over the past several weeks, the Soviets have moved an airborne brigade plus about 35 additional helicopters into Kabul. Officials say there is little the U.S. can do to help the Afghan rebels. Sources tell CBS News the CIA is already spending \$75 million a year on secret arms shipments to the rebels but that will not buy the kind of anti-aircraft weapons needed to shoot down high-flying bombers. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.